



Proficiency-Based Grading and the Four-Point Scale Overview

What is Proficiency-Based Grading?

Gateway believes that grades should communicate—as clearly as possible—what students know and can do. We also seek to create a growth mindset environment that encourages students to take risks and embrace mistakes as learning opportunities. Proficiency-based grading and the corresponding four-point scale are set up to support these two values by breaking course content into clear learning goals, and assessing students on their progress towards meeting those goals—rather than focusing on assignment completion over evidence of learning. This allows for more meaningful student work and teacher feedback, and moves away from an approach in which students can earn a required amount of points through “playing the game” rather than meeting the established learning goals. Here’s a more detailed comparison of the two approaches:

Traditional Grading System/100 Point Scale	Proficiency-Based System/Four Point Scale
<p>Emphasizes a percentage score encompassing and essentially averaging all of the work throughout the grading period.</p> <p>In this model, a student who struggles with concepts and skills when they’re first introduced may never earn back enough points to give an accurate reflection of what he or she knows later in the marking period. On the other hand, a student may have earned enough points early in the quarter to not give his or her best effort on a final project and still receive a high mark for the quarter.</p>	<p>Emphasizes what a student knows and can do by the end of the marking period.</p> <p>In this model, a student who struggles with a skill early in the quarter but has mastered the skill at the end is rewarded. Earlier struggles with the skill don’t punish the student if he or she learns it by the end. As the grade is a continuous reflection of what the student presently knows, the emphasis is always on trying one’s best.</p>
<p>Scores assessment using a 100-point scale.</p> <p>But can a student, parent, or teacher decipher the difference between an 83% and an 86% as a meaningful reflection of what a student knows?</p>	<p>Scores assessments on a 4-point scale. With four standard deviations between scores, compared to one hundred, it is likely that more than one teacher could measure the student’s understanding on a 4-point scale (with a clearly defined performance rubric) and come to the same result, as opposed to scoring the same student on a 100-point scale.</p>
<p>Academic habits and behavior are included in measures of what students know and can do, often obscuring students’ knowledge and skill.</p>	<p>Academic habits, behavior, and mindsets (at Gateway, these are called Process of Learning) are assessed independently of proficiency so that students’ progress toward meeting the learning objectives is clear.</p>
<p>Students struggling to earn the grade they want may ask to do extra credit work to earn the points needed to get the percentage for the desired final grade. This extra work may or may not demonstrate that the student has met the learning goals.</p>	<p>Students may revise or retake certain assessments to show mastery of a skill. The conversation shifts from earning points to practicing a skill until students meet the learning goal.</p>

What is the four-point scale?

Educational researcher Robert Marzano developed the four point scale to more clearly assess what a student knows and can do:

0	1.0	2.0	3.0	4.0
Even with help, no understanding or skill is demonstrated	With help, there is a partial understanding of some of the simpler details and processes of the learning goal.	No major errors or omissions regarding the simpler details or processes of the learning goal, but major errors or omissions regarding the complex processes	No major errors or omissions regarding any of the information and/or processes of the learning goal that were explicitly taught.	In addition to score 3.0 performances, in-depth inferences and applications go beyond what was taught in class.

Grading on a 4-point scale means putting aside our traditional understanding of percentages. A “3” on the four-point scale translates to a “B” even though Powerschool will communicate this as a 75% (which we might traditionally translate to be a “C”). Focus instead on the grade and its relationship to the above scale.

What does this look like in practice?

- Teachers and students engage in frequent conversations about what 4/3/2/1 work looks like. This means that performance rubrics for assignments are communicated with students *in advance* and examples of past work are shown, when appropriate.
- Teachers design assessments that emphasize application of skills than repetition of facts. Assessments are designed to provide opportunities for demonstration of advanced knowledge.
- Students can use their assessment data to set goals for their learning. This also means that students have more information than a simple percentage or score. They should be able to identify their strengths and areas that need improvement.
- Assessments before, during, and after a unit of instruction offer students with the ability to track their progress. Teachers can use this information to remediate when necessary, and to provide challenge and extension activities for students consistently performing at the “4” level.
- Across the team, teachers are using a **consistent language of assessment** when describing class performance. This means that students should be hearing similar terminology when it comes to how they are evaluated.